1998 STUDY OF
THE STATUS OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

A Special Demonstration Project
supported by funding under Section 353 of the Federal Adult Education Act
through grants awarded by the State of Michigan Board of Education

DATA SUMMARY

October, 1998

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAMS/STUDENTS

Fall 1997 Pupil Accounting Information provided by the Michigan Department of Education shows the following:

- 23,264 full-time-equivalent pupils were reported as students served in alternative education programs in September, 1997
- 77 districts in the counties of Kent, Genesse, Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne provided programs for 11,438 students (49%)
- 193 districts distributed among the other counties in the State provided programs for 11,826 students (51%)

SURVEY RESULTS

The Study's major component was a 36-question Survey sent to 369 identified programs in the State. Completed Surveys were returned by 258 programs during the months of April, May, and June,1998. The following is a summary of responses to survey questions.

1. STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION REFLECTED IN THE STUDY

Total Enrollment	21,014		ENROLLMENT REASONS:	
			Expelled	1,022
Males	54.5%		Attendance Problems	6,644
Females	45.5%		Poor Academic Performance	4,978
			Discipline Problems	2,687
age 11-13	2.8%		Court Order	1,326
age 14-15	12.2%		Voluntary Drop Out / Chose AE	5,558
age 16-17	48.4%		Teen Parent	2,331
age 18-19	35.6%		Weapons Expulsion	197
White	69.0%		GED enrollees	915
Native American	2.3%		Qualify for Free Lunch	8,747
Asian / Pacific Islander	1.5%		Work Part Time	6,534
African American	22.0%		Work Full Time	1,577
Hispanic	4.9%			
			Teen Parent w/ 1 child	2,008
'97 grads	4,483		Teen Parent w/ 2 children	301
			Teen Parent w/ 3+ children	21

Total Instructional Staff	1,554		258 programs returned a completed Survey Form
Total Administrative Staff	384		
			63 programs serve middle school age students
Full Time Instructional Staff	953		250 programs serve high school age students
Part Time Instructional Staff	601		

2. FOUR PROGRAM CATEGORIES DESIGNATED FOR THE STUDY

To enable investigation of similarities and/or differences among programs attributable to program size and for purposes of this study, programs have been placed into 4 categories based on enrollment.

PROGRAM CATEGORY DESIGNATION* (BY ENROLLMENT RANGE)	I (8-45)	II (46-90)	III (91-135)	IV (136-625)	ALL PROGRAMS (8-625)
Total number of programs in category	110	73	38	37	258
Total number of students in category	2,838	4,918	4,228	9,030	21,014
Average program age (in years) in category	6.8	9.9	9.2	14.8	9.1

3. ENROLLMENT REASONS – PERCENT OF STUDENTS

	I	II	II	IV	ALL
expelled	5.8%	4.4%	4.1%	5.2%	4.9%
attendance problems	30.8%	33.1%	31.2%	31.3%	31.6%
poor academic performance	29.1%	21.8%	23.4%	23.1%	23.7%
discipline problems	14.6%	13.6%	13.6%	11.4%	12.8%
court order	4.9%	5.4%	7.0%	6.9%	6.3%
voluntary drop out – chose AE	16.6%	30.1%	27.8%	26.9%	26.4%
teen parent	7.4%	10.4%	8.5%	13.9%	11.0%
weapons expulsion	1.4%	0.5%	0.6%	1.2%	0.9%
GED enrollees	2.6%	2.7%	2.5%	6.6%	4.3%

Note: each respondent was permitted to select more than one reason students are enrolled

4. EXTENT OF 7 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS UTILIZED – AVERAGES OF SELF-RATING SCORES BY INSTRUCTION TYPE

Self-rating Scale: 0 = not at all   1 = very little   2 = some   3 = a great deal

	I	II	III	IV	ALL
individual	2.248	1.819	1.595	1.811	1.946
small group	2.257	2.028	2.216	2.000	2.124
class with 1 teacher	2.147	2.347	2.568	2.514	2.291
class with 1 teacher & 1 aide	1.110	0.708	0.622	1.189	0.926
learning lab	0.881	1.25	0.838	1.189	1.012
computer assisted	1.239	1.75	1.486	1.514	1.442
self paced	1.514	1.472	1.162	1.324	1.407

5. PROGRAM DESIGN ELEMENTS UTILIZED -- NUMBER/PERCENT OF PROGRAMS

I	II	III	IV	ALL		I	II	III	IV	ALL
12	20	7	13	52	pupils combined w/ adult ed. students	10.9%	27.4%	18.4%	35.1%	20.2%
24	5	16	4	58	consortium member	21.8%	6.8%	42.1%	10.8%	22.5%
26	14	3	5	48	located in another school	23.6%	19.2%	7.9%	13.5%	18.6%
84	63	35	35	215	located in separate building	76.4%	86.3%	92.1%	94.6%	83.3%
51	22	13	12	98	K-12 administered	46.4%	30.1%	34.2%	32.4%	38.0%
42	41	22	22	129	Community Ed administered	38.2%	56.2%	57.9%	59.5%	50.0%
39	28	21	15	103	access Section 31a funds	35.5%	38.4%	55.3%	40.5%	39.9%
2	8	2	3	17	access private foundation funds	1.8%	11.0%	5.3%	8.1%	6.6%
82	72	36	35	225	director w/ budget responsibility	74.5%	98.6%	94.7%	94.6%	87.2%
68	45	23	24	160	designated as a "choice" program	61.8%	61.6%	60.5%	64.9%	62.0%
50	43	19	23	135	conduct recruiting activities	45.5%	58.9%	50.0%	62.2%	52.3%
64	25	24	29	173	offer vocational courses	58.2%	34.2%	63.2%	78.4%	67.1%
93	21	31	26	217	hold parent-teacher conferences	84.5%	28.8%	81.6%	70.3%	84.1%

6. PROGRAM COMPONENTS ADDRESSED -- NUMBER/PERCENT OF PROGRAMS

I	II	III	IV	ALL		I	II	III	IV	ALL
75	55	30	25	185	dropout prevention	68.2%	75.3%	78.9%	67.6%	71.7%
86	61	32	31	210	academic remediation	78.2%	83.6%	84.2%	83.8%	81.4%
77	47	25	23	172	behavior modification	70.0%	64.4%	65.8%	62.2%	66.7%
41	29	14	7	91	sub abuse prevention	37.3%	39.7%	36.8%	18.9%	35.3%
17	12	4	10	43	in-school suspension	15.5%	16.4%	10.5%	27.0%	16.7%
74	53	26	25	178	interpersonal skills	67.3%	72.6%	68.4%	67.6%	69.0%
30	30	14	11	85	community service	27.3%	41.1%	36.8%	29.7%	32.9%
35	30	14	12	91	parent involvement	31.8%	41.1%	36.8%	32.4%	35.3%
78	55	29	21	183	self-esteem enhancement	70.9%	75.3%	76.3%	56.8%	70.9%
18	29	14	11	72	teen pregnancy prevention	16.4%	39.7%	36.8%	29.7%	27.9%

7. STUDENT SERVICES PROVIDED – NUMBER/PERCENT OF PROGRAMS

I	II	III	IV	ALL		I	II	III	IV	ALL
24	33	23	25	105	child care	21.8%	45.2%	60.5%	67.6%	40.7%
20	17	8	8	53	spec education	18.2%	23.3%	21.1%	21.6%	20.5%
14	25	8	8	55	home/school intervention	12.7%	34.2%	21.1%	21.6%	21.3%
64	44	27	22	157	transportation	58.2%	60.3%	71.1%	59.5%	74.0%
76	53	31	31	191	school lunch	69.1%	72.6%	81.6%	83.8%	60.9%
40	31	15	21	107	school breakfast	36.4%	42.5%	39.5%	56.8%	41.5%
20	24	7	9	60	health services	18.2%	32.9%	18.4%	24.3%	23.3%
45	48	24	26	143	job search assistance	40.9%	65.8%	63.2%	70.3%	55.4%
84	63	35	37	219	academic counseling	76.4%	86.3%	92.1%	100.0%	84.9%
78	55	32	31	196	personal counseling	70.9%	75.3%	84.2%	83.8%	76.0%
53	49	29	25	156	referral services	48.2%	67.1%	76.3%	67.6%	60.5%

8. PROGRAMMING TIME STRUCTURES UTILIZED -- NUMBER/PERCENT OF PROGRAMS

I	II	III	IV	ALL		I	II	III	IV	ALL
36	65	33	33	226	10 month school year	32.7%	89.0%	86.8%	89.2%	87.6%
1	0	0	3	5	12 month school year	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	8.1%	1.9%
14	7	5	3	27	other	12.7%	9.6%	13.2%	8.1%	10.5%
69	50	13	17	157	2 semesters, 4 9-week terms	62.7%	68.5%	34.2%	45.9%	60.9%
11	5	2	3	21	2 semesters, 6 6-week terms	10.0%	6.8%	5.3%	8.1%	8.1%
10	6	2	9	27	2 semesters, no terms	9.1%	8.2%	5.3%	24.3%	10.5%
19	12	13	9	63	other	17.3%	16.4%	34.2%	24.3%	24.4%
56	26	7	14	114	1 hour periods	50.9%	35.6%	18.4%	37.8%	44.2%
13	6	8	7	34	2 hour periods	11.8%	8.2%	21.1%	18.9%	13.2%
41	42	15	23	121	other	37.3%	57.5%	39.5%	62.2%	46.9%

9. STUDENT PROGRESS INDICATORS UTILIZED -- NUMBER/PERCENT OF PROGRAMS

I	II	III	IV	ALL		I	II	III	IV	ALL
102	70	36	35	243	performance reports/tests	92.7%	95.9%	94.7%	94.6%	94.2%
100	68	36	32	236	attendance	90.9%	93.2%	94.7%	86.5%	91.5%
35	49	26	24	167	behavior data	31.8%	67.1%	68.4%	64.9%	64.7%
49	43	22	21	135	retention rates	44.5%	58.9%	57.9%	56.8%	52.3%
33	29	14	14	90	attitude measures	30.0%	39.7%	36.8%	37.8%	34.9%
58	55	30	23	166	graduation rates	52.7%	75.3%	78.9%	62.2%	64.3%
36	39	18	15	108	dropout rates	32.7%	53.4%	47.4%	40.5%	41.9%
39	16	9	11	75	transition back to home school	35.5%	21.9%	23.7%	29.7%	29.1%
1	2	0	0	3	none	0.9%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%

10. STUDENT RETENTION -- PERCENT OF STUDENTS

	I	II	III	IV	ALL
less than 1 semester	12.9%	12.7%	8.7%	17.7%	14.1%
1 semester	14.9%	18.1%	9.0%	12.9%	13.6%
1 year	23.9%	24.6%	28.9%	22.6%	24.5%
more than 1 year, less than graduation	22.5%	22.5%	19.3%	22.3%	21.8%
until graduation*	18.8%	18.1%	18.4%	19.0%	18.8%

* data reflect enrollment/graduation numbers only from programs that serve students through grade 12. (245 out of the 258 programs in the Study)

11. PROGRAM STRENGTHS, STRUGGLES, NEEDS AND MISSION ORIENTATION -- NUMBER/PERCENT OF ALL PROGRAMS

PROGRAM'S GREATEST STRENGTH			TOP INSERVICE TRAINING NEEDS		
Teachers / staff	87	34.8%	Effective Alter Ed teaching methods	97	38.8%
Individual attention to students	55	22.0%	Behavior management/discipline	96	38.4%
Small size	45	18.0%	Curriculum / core curriculum alignment	67	26.8%
Flexibility	34	13.6%	Technology	42	16.8%
Family atmosphere	23	9.2%	Working with LD/ADD/ADHD	33	13.2%
			Classroom management	32	12.8%
PROGRAM'S GREATEST STRUGGLE			**PROGRAM MISSION ORIENTATION**		
Student attendance	95	38.0%	"Outcome" orientation	50	20.7%
Student motivation	48	19.2%	"Process" orientation	191	79.3%
Violence/Behavior	28	11.2%			
Retention	27	10.8%			
Facilities	20	8.0%			
Funding	20	8.0%			

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Three focus group sessions were conducted during the month of May: one in western Michigan, one in the northern lower peninsula, and one in south-east Michigan. Voluntary participants were Alternative Education practitioners representing 30 districts. The purpose of the focus groups was to generate comments to far-reaching issues from practitioners in face-to-face settings. The following is a summary of the most frequently offered comments.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION'S GREATEST CHALLENGES

- Effectively meeting multiple needs of at-risk students in an increasingly diverse society
- Defining precisely what alternative education does and for who
- Sustaining credibility and positive identity of programs within school districts, communities and the state

TRENDS INFLUENCING PROGRAMMING

- More and more of a need for serving middle-school age students
- Increasingly higher degrees of at-riskness
- Over-all numbers of students increasing
- Traditional high schools less tolerant of at-risk behaviors

NONFINANCIAL RESOURCES THAT COULD HELP WITH LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS

- Form more partnerships with community agencies and with businesses
- Increase access to relevant community resources

STUDENT NEEDS ON WHICH GREATER PROGRAMMING EMPHASIS SHOULD BE PLACED

- Social skill / life skill development
- Student motivation
- Technology skills

ON-SITE VISITATIONS

During the months of April, May, and June, 1998, eighteen on-site program visitations were conducted. As a sample, the visitation sites were selected for reasonable representation in terms of geography and program type. Structured Interviews were conducted for the purpose of obtaining first-hand answers to questions probing more program detail than addressed in the written Survey. The highlights of the information gathered follow.

PHILOSOPHY

There seems to be 3 philosophical camps into which programs fall: (a) emphasis on the consequences of choices made, (b) stressing real-world connections and applications and (c) focus on caring, supporting and giving personal attention.

CURRICULUM

All programs offer core curriculum courses.
Some offer or provide access to vocational-type courses.
Very few have a fully written/aligned curriculum.
Some have portions of the curriculum written in the form of course descriptions or course outlines.

INTAKE PROCEDURES

Most programs conduct some type of an intake interview with each potential student; some require parents to be present during the interview.
Most administer some type of basic skills assessment.

STUDENT PROGRESS ASSESSMENT

Most all programs use teacher-made tests, quizzes, and exams.
Very few are incorporating "alternate" forms of assessment, i.e., performance exhibitions.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Most programs make available the State "High Stakes" Tests; few regard the results as meaningful.
Very few have goals and evaluation methods aligned.
Most all struggle with program evaluation.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Most all programs have "credit jeopardy" for poor attendance; most have a "make-up" policy.
Few have incentives for good attendance.

DISCIPLINE POLICIES

Most programs employ removal from the classroom and suspensions for disruptive behavior.

Some use behavior agreements as a means of working on inappropriate behaviors.

Very few employ incentives for appropriate behaviors.

LEARNER FEEDBACK

Most programs send home grade reports each nine weeks.

Few use weekly/bi-weekly progress reports.

Very few ask teachers to make frequent phone contact with parents.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Some programs take steps to involve and communicate with parents; others attempt to "treat the student as an adult" and take no steps to involve parents.

PARTNERSHIPS

Many programs have partnerships with community agencies.

Few have partnerships with local businesses.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Very few programs view safety as an issue.

STUDENT LIFE-SKILL ISSUES

Most programs address self-esteem, conflict resolution, personal decision making, and interpersonal communication via the day-to-day patterns of teacher-student interaction.

Some have courses, such as Career Exploration and Life Skills, that formally address these issues.

Most address cultural diversity in social studies classes and substance abuse in health classes.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Some programs have tried student government with limited results.

Most provide activities such as competitive basketball, volleyball, field trips, special interest outings, etc.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS

Many programs serve a small number of academic achievers.

STAFF-RELATED POLICIES

Most programs routinely involve staff in program-level decisions in both scheduled meetings and informal settings.

Most follow formal staff evaluation procedures determine by the district or professional agreement provisions.

Almost all make available professional development opportunities to teachers, including program/district-level staff development days, county/regional workshops and seminars, and state conferences.

FACILITIES

A vast majority of programs are housed in buildings that were originally designed for another purpose, e.g., an old elementary school.

Very few have up-to-date computer labs and software.

Most buildings are clean and well maintained.

Some lack a gymnasium-type facility for desirable student physical activity.

ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Most administrators are rewarded with the prospect of truly changing the lives of some adolescents.

Many struggle with meeting diverse student needs with limited resources.

Some are concerned with lack of time and strategy to engage staff in improvement efforts and provide staff support.

Some are concerned with lack of support and program legitimization from the district.

Some get demoralized because of poor student attendance, nature and frequency of discipline problems, and lack of student motivation.

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

Most teachers feel rewarded from "making a difference", deeply challenged by the nature of the students, and, at times, frustrated by the lack of desired results.

Most enjoy and appreciate the flexible attributes of alternative education, the freedom to be innovative/non-traditional, and the opportunity to work with students on a more personal level.

Most are concerned with poor student attendance, students not giving their best, the frequency of disruptive classroom behaviors, and the challenge of accommodating so many levels and needs.

Some would like to see more technology and access to vocational-type classes.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Interviewed students in all programs visited expressed the following:

   Smaller classes in alternative education make it possible for teachers to give students more personal attention.

   Teachers listen to student problems and care more about student's lives.

   Teachers give more individual help to students.

   Most students feel accepted; students get to know each other.

   The school atmosphere is more relaxed.